



West Nile Virus



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's) For City of Seattle Employees

West Nile virus (WNV) is a mosquito-borne disease affecting birds, horses, other animals, and sometimes humans. Washington State had one human case reported in Pierce County in 2006, and mosquito, bird and horse cases in Washington in 2002, 2005, and 2006. West Nile virus and other diseases transmitted by mosquitoes are a public health concern.

The City of Seattle is working with Public Health – Seattle and King County, to provide information about how employees can protect themselves and reduce mosquito breeding sites.

How is the City of Seattle responding to West Nile virus?

The City has developed a tiered response strategy and an Integrated Pest Management Plan for City owned and operated property. The strategy focuses on education, breeding habitat reduction, natural and mechanical controls, and the possible use of larvicides (pesticides intended to control mosquito larvae in water). Communication to City employees is a key priority of this plan to ensure that all City employees understand the issues and preventive measures.

How can I best protect myself from mosquito bites while on the job?

Health department officials recommend the following:

- When possible, wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants when mosquitoes are biting.
- Consider using insect repellent. Repellants are available for employee use while on the job. (*Contact your Safety Officer for information on how to select and use a repellent.*)
- Don't give mosquitoes a place to breed. Empty anything that holds standing water for more than about seven days (*old tires, empty flower pots, etc.*).

Am I required to wear protective clothing and/or use insect repellents?

These personal protection measures are recommended, but not required. Repellents are available for employees use while at work. There is no cost to employees for these products.

Which insect repellents are most effective against mosquitoes?

Repellents containing the chemical N-N-diethyl-mata-toluamide (DEET) are known to be effective. However, some people are particularly sensitive to DEET and you should always use caution when applying repellents. A slow release formulation can offer a longer period of protection with a lower concentration of active ingredient. Alternative repellents without DEET are available with varying levels of effectiveness. The City will provide both DEET and alternative repellent products to employees. Products with the active ingredient Picaridin seem to be particularly effective. It is important to always read the labels of all repellent products and follow instructions carefully.

What is the risk of infection and/or death resulting from West Nile virus?

Studies in areas of the country that have had WNV cases show that up to 5 percent of mosquitoes in an area with WNV will be carrying the virus. Even if established in local birds and mosquitoes, human illness is not expected to be frequent. In 2005 in the U.S., there were about 2949 confirmed human WNV cases with 116 deaths.

Most people experience no effects from the bite of an infected mosquito. Twenty percent of people bitten by a mosquito that is carrying the virus become infected with a mild-to-serious illness that can last for several weeks. Less than one percent (about 1 in every 150) of persons who become infected with West

Nile virus develop the more serious neuroinvasive form of the disease. Some people who recover from this acute illness may suffer long-term effects, including weakness, cognitive impairment, or disability. People of all ages can become ill with West Nile virus, but people over age 50 are at higher risk. The risk of getting a severe illness that can lead to disabling after-effects or death increases with age.

What steps should employees take to report a potential source of mosquitoes?

Employees should let their supervisors know if they are concerned about mosquito breeding potential in a city facility. Supervisors should consider whether a modification can occur to eliminate the breeding potential. For example, old tires can be removed and disposed of, or a work order can be called in for a leaky drinking fountain. If the site cannot be easily modified or cleaned up or if the site is a natural wetland or pond, the supervisor should contact the department's West Nile virus coordinator.

What should I do if I find a dead bird near or around my worksite?

To help learn more about West Nile virus, Public Health is tracking the deaths of crows, jays and ravens. If you find an intact recently dead bird, please call Public Health – Seattle and King County at **206-205-4394**. Be prepared to provide the address where you found the bird.

How will the City handle mosquito control on City property?

The City is taking an Integrated Pest Management (IPM) approach which favors pest prevention and natural and mechanical controls over pesticide use. Encouraging personal protection from bites and reductions of breeding habitat are the most important first steps. When circumstances indicate that some form of mosquito control is necessary, the City will first consider non-chemical controls before considering using pesticides.

How will the City manage mosquitoes in wetlands and storm water ponds?

Many people have the false impression that wetlands and storm water ponds are a major source of mosquito breeding. The truth is that healthy wetlands are full of natural predators such as fish, birds, and frogs that eat mosquitoes, which is a more sustainable way to control mosquitoes long-term than draining wetlands or applying pesticides. Storm water ponds also contain natural predators, and some dry up during the warmer mosquito breeding months of the years. The City also considers encouraging populations of natural mosquito predators where appropriate.

Who should I tell residents to call if they have questions or concerns?

Citizen calls asking general questions about West Nile virus should be referred to Public Health's West Nile virus hotline, **206-205-3883**. Inquiries from citizens or employees about dead birds, standing water, or mosquitoes on private properties should be referred to Public Health at 206-205-4394. Dead birds may be reported on-line at www.metrokc.gov/health/westnile. Complaints about mosquitoes or standing water on City properties should be referred to the WNV coordinator for the city department that owns the facility/property. If the appropriate city department is unknown, inquiries should be referred to Sheila Strehle, the citywide West Nile virus coordinator, at 206.684.5846.

Internet References

For general information and a list of city department WNV coordinators, visit www.seattle.gov/util and click on [About West Nile Virus](#). You can also visit the Public Health - Seattle and King County web site at www.metrokc.gov/health/westnile for more information.